



OCT. 16, 2009

HEALTH UPDATE

Screening Requests for Emergency Medical Service Dispatch for Respiratory Illness *Recommendations for Public Safety Answering Points and Emergency Medical Services*

Because of increasing transmission of seasonal and H1N1 influenza in North Dakota, the North Dakota Department of Health (NDDoH) is recommending:

- All public safety answering points (PSAP) begin to screen requests for EMS dispatch for possible respiratory illness on scene; and,
- EMS providers notified by a PSAP that one or more patients at a scene may have a respiratory illness should wear appropriate personal protective equipment to reduce the risk of disease transmission.

PSAP Screening

The North Dakota Department of Health recommends the following screening question be asked of all callers requesting EMS response: *Does the patient have a cough or fever?* If the caller responds yes, the possible presence of a patient with respiratory infection should be communicated to the responding EMS unit. The 911 Association in North Dakota has designated a code to be used to indicate that a patient with possible respiratory infection is on scene. The designated code will be communicated to EMS through separate communication channels.

EMS Respiratory Protection

When notified of a patient with a possible respiratory illness on scene, EMS personnel should use transmission precautions described in EMS protocols located at www.ndhealth.gov/EMS/Protocol.htm. In addition, the Department of Health recommends that EMS responders who are notified by the PSAP of a possible acute respiratory illness at the scene wear respiratory protection. Unless the Department of Health has provided guidelines to EMS for personal protective equipment which supersede this document, respiratory protection for EMS providers should include:

- a) Excluding non-patients from a minimum of a three foot perimeter around the patient(s).
- b) Wearing a surgical mask when no aerosol producing procedures are anticipated.
- c) Wearing an N95 respirator plus face shield or goggles during aerosol producing procedures (e.g., respiratory suctioning, endotracheal intubation, CPR and nebulizer treatments).

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Risk from Aerosols

Because aerosols containing a potentially viable infective agent can remain suspended in the air for a substantial period of time, all EMS responders should wear an N95 respirator through the remainder of the response period following an aerosol producing procedure. EMS responders should have been fit tested for N95 wear and should use the respirator they were approved to wear during the fit testing.

Because of the prolonged suspension of aerosols, people nearby who are not wearing adequate respiratory protection should leave the immediate area. If the patient is being cared for indoors, others in the area should be told that the risk for transmission of the illness may remain elevated in the area for a substantial period of time after the patient is gone. The duration of elevated infectivity will depend on the organism and environmental conditions but may last for hours.

For more information, please contact the North Dakota Department of Health, Division of Disease Control, at 701.328.2378 or 800.472.2180.

Categories of Health Alert messages:

- Health Alert conveys the highest level of importance; warrants immediate action or attention.
- Health Advisory provides important information for a specific incident or situation; may not require immediate action.
- Health Update provides updated information regarding an incident or situation; no immediate action necessary.
- Health Information provides general information that is not necessarily considered to be of an emergent nature.

This message is being sent to local public health units, clinics, hospitals, physicians, tribal health, North Dakota Nurses Association, North Dakota Long Term Care Association, North Dakota Healthcare Association, North Dakota Medical Association, and hospital public information officers.